

FRED BAKER
21 March 1967



47 Great Jones Street New York 10012

(212) 982-2350

Miss Sally Wolensky
Lincoln Center Film Department
Lincoln Center
New York City

Dear Miss Wolensky,

Thank you for your phone call and your expressed interest in our work here at Filmstage. I hope the enclosed prospectus will indicate our future plans and eventual goals. If, in any way, you can suggest sources we might be able to go to at this time for our urgently needed funds, we would be very grateful.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Fred Baker'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Fred Baker

Artistic Director/Filmstage

FILMSTAGE EXCHANGE PROJECT

It has been two decades since the independent film movement cracked the hold of the major studios over what kind of films would be made and who would make them. Many felt then that American filmmaking was entering a new era of creativity. The new freedom would insure a continual flow of new ideas, new talent and new techniques onto the American screen. As it turned out, nothing of the kind happened. What improvements there have been were slow in coming, intermittent, and one could not help feeling largely accidental. Because of the financial picture and new channels of distribution, nothing is insured, least of all any continuity in the development of film art in this country. The film revolution of those two decades came from abroad. That revolution created a new audience in America ready for quality films and, equally important, by its sheer creative energy a new generation of young American filmmakers with the talent and desire to make quality American films. Today more talented young people want to get into films than ever before, more artists and writers are interested in the possibilities of the medium.

Neither of these groups, the quality movie-goers or the young filmmakers, has found a remotely satisfying place in the limbo the American film industry now occupies. This is terrain somewhere beyond the paternalism of network-controlled television, but it is mined with all the artistic restrictions that plague Broadway stage productions. Young film talent suffers a further disadvantage in that, unlike the theater, the film industry lacks the equivalent of an Off-Broadway seedling ground, where the financial stakes are modest

enough to allow for the professional production of unknown or experimental work.

It is in this context that Filmstage was founded last year by Fred Baker and James Salter, two experienced, New York-based directors who believe that the peculiar problem of motion picture production can be hurdled by young, unknown filmmakers and that a reservoir of new talent can be created and maintained for the American screen. Broadly, the problems young filmmakers face are well known. An exceedingly low-budget film, for example, requires the financial backing of a full-scale Broadway production. The technical skills that go into the execution of a relatively simple film idea are enormous and to be gained only through very specialized training. Equipment and facilities, also very specialized, are expensive and after a certain point cannot be improvised without seriously affecting the final product. And finally, largely because of the foregoing, the atmosphere of hope, not to say realistic promise, that might draw together the wide variety of artistic and technical talent necessary to take the first beginning steps toward filmmaking is altogether absent. All this would not bear repeating if it were not to emphasize that any attempt to provide for the future of American film -- the films made five and ten years from now by the young filmmakers of today -- must be radically comprehensive. It must draw the talent, provide the physical plant and professional expertise for development, and, fundamentally, before everything else, it must offer a genuine chance for young filmmakers to make films.

Filmstage is the only organization we know of that is attempting to do all this on a long-term basis. Since the summer of 1966 it has been supplying editing rooms, a shooting stage and professional equipment to young New York filmmakers at below cost rates. Thus far four films, including two features, have been either shot or edited at Filmstage. (The Off-Broadway production of "Golden Screw," dropped by NET, used Filmstage for five weeks for rehearsals and backer auditions until it found a new producer, and is now scheduled to open at the Providencetown Playhouse.

In early November the first Filmstage project was inaugurated with the presentation of "The Future of American Film" series, ten evenings of discussions designed to bring the most talented film professionals on the East Coast before small gatherings of filmmakers and those seriously interested in cinema. These included leading figures on the business and talent sides of the industry - Sydney Lumet, Paddy Chayefsky, Rod Steiger, Aram Avakian, exhibitor Donald S. Rugoff, distributor David V. Picker of United Artists, Frances Ford Coppola, Andrew Sarris, and Roger Lewis. The success of the series, not only in terms of attendance but as shown by the exchange of ideas and enthusiasm of the participants, clearly established that Filmstage was filling a real need among young Filmmakers. As a result of the series, which also helped to clarify many of the problems confronting young filmmakers, Filmstage became all the more convinced of the soundness of its original conception as an independent production center and film workshop.

In just over half a year Filmstage has provided a focus of interest for many young New York filmmakers and begun to fill their needs. It has done

this primarily by seeing the problems of these filmmakers in concrete terms and gearing its program for concrete results. During this time it has also done some hard thinking and exploring of its own to come up with a detailed program designed to provide on a continuing basis a workshop environment with facilities, the involvement of some of the best craftsmen in the industry donating their time, and a progressive schedule of projects that in a year's time will include the production of its first low-budget feature film.

The program is called Filmstage Exchange Project. It will operate under a five-member directorship corporation consisting of well-known figures in the film industry. The project calls for the initial participation of five young filmmakers of ability, three writers, 13 actors and actresses, and a technical staff of about 12. The program itself is divided into six inter-related projects or activities, which are as follows:

Sunday: Free Film Exchange -- the core project running five hours in the afternoon which will bring together everybody for discussion, talks by professionals, screenings of footage from Filmstage projects and works in progress. Out of these afternoons, during which directors and writers can meet together and formulate projects, draw on actors and consult with the technical staff, will emerge the various interests of the participants and lead to the breakdown of the other five projects.

Wednesday and Friday: Workshop evenings, from 7 to 12. Wednesday evenings will alternate between a Camera and Lighting Workshop

and a Camera and Sound Workshop. Technical staff and students will participate. Friday evenings will be devoted to a Film Acting Workshop, involving a director, writer, and all the actors. Here scenes will be run through with the emphasis on dramatic forms and directorial skills.

Monday, Tuesday and Thursday: Small film project evenings, from 7 to 12. These will be three separate projects developing out of the Wednesday and Friday workshops, and will include a director, writer, and actors. Filmstage foresees these groups beginning to shoot short scenes within three months, some of which will develop into short films. Within a year a number of these small projects will have been completed and the skills of the participants progressively increased. At this point, one low-budget film, developing out of one of the smaller projects, will be finished and two or three more will be ready to shoot.

At present, Filmstage occupies a 2,300-square foot renovated loft, consisting of a 60 X 25-foot shooting stage, three cutting rooms, an administration office and a sound-proof projection booth. Equipment is valued at \$5,000.

The Filmstage Exchange Project has an immediate need of a \$10,000 grant to cover its first six months. After that it is estimated that annual operating costs of the Project will run \$25,000, to be met through government subsidies, foundation and corporation grants, or through private individuals.

Feature film production costs will be backed on an individual basis.

Up to now the building and operating costs of Filmstage have been paid by Fred Baker and James Salter. Salter has made a Venice prizewinning short "Team, Team, Team" and a documentary series for NET. He has worked on a variety of other films and his screenplay "The Appointment" is to be produced this summer in Europe. Baker has worked primarily in the theater, beginning as an actor on Broadway at 16. He was stage manager for twelve Broadway productions, including "Hotel Paradiso," "The Country Wife," "Rashomon," and "Critic's Choice." He began directing films and plays in 1960 with the Edinburgh and Berlin prizewinner "On the Sound," and has since directed over 30 National Tours.

Both Salter and Baker are very concerned with bridging the widening gap between young filmmakers and the established American film industry. They believe there are a number of talented young filmmakers who can benefit from a comprehensive workshop environment. They are also associated with other young filmmakers of proven skill who are ready to make their first feature films. Both of these groups will be represented in the Filmstage Exchange Project. If quality American films are being made ten years from now, Filmstage is certain some of them will be made by these young filmmakers.

Fred Baker
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Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research,
with support from the
National Historical Publications and Records Commission.**



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